

Slide 1

“Chasing After The Wind”

Wisdom Can Make Life Better

ECCLESIASTES 7:1-10

Introduction

1. When Solomon began this book which we are studying, he said “I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 1:13, NASB95).
2. His response to his search — “I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving (chasing) after wind” (Ecclesiastes 1:14, NASB95).
3. At the end of chapter one he stated wisdom does not make life worth living,
 - a. “because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain” (Ecclesiastes 1:18, NASB95)
 - b. or as the NIV84 translates it “For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.”
4. Here, in chapters 7 & 8, Solomon takes a second look at wisdom and draws some different conclusions.
5. The words “wisdom” and “wise” are each found nine times in these two chapters.
6. In these chapters we find Solomon answering the question he asked back in 6:12, “For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime?”
7. Here in chapter 7, the Preacher, as Solomon calls himself, names three contributions which wisdom can make to our lives.

8. I have drawn these from a commentary by Warren Wiersbe, which he titled, "Be Satisfied."
9. Tonight, I will focus on the first of those: "Wisdom Can Make Life Better" which takes in the first ten verses of Ecclesiastes 7.

Slide 2

A. SORROW IS BETTER THAN LAUGHTER (VV. 1-4)

"A good name is better than a good ointment,
And the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth.
It is better to go to a house of mourning
Than to go to a house of feasting,
Because that is the end of every man, And the living takes it to heart.
Sorrow is better than laughter,
For when a face is sad a heart may be happy.
The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning,
While the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure."

(Ecclesiastes 7:1-4, NASB95)

1. Eight times in these first ten verses, Solomon uses a word (*min*) which in our English translations is rendered as "better."
2. It is a comparative term which we use to evaluate something.
3. Oftentimes when we are shopping either online or in a physical store, we will compare items to determine which is the better product.
4. Here, Solomon tells us that some things are better than others, as he lays out his comparisons.
5. When Solomon states, in verse 1, "A good name is better than good ointment, and the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth," he is not suggesting that it is better to die than to be born.
6. Instead, he is contrasting two significant days in our lives — the day of our birth, when we receive our name, and the day of our death when our name is listed in our obituary.

7. It is the life lived between those two events which determines how we are remembered.
8. Both a good name and a good ointment (perfume) were highly valued in Solomon and Jesus' day.
9. The Jews taught "a person has three names: one that he is called by his father and mother; one that people know him by, and one that he acquires for himself." (Midrash, *Kohelet Rabba*)

2a

10. Solomon had something to say about this in Proverbs 10:7, "the memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked will rot."
11. Several times in Proverbs, Solomon speaks of the joy experienced by a father whose wise son heeds his teachings (Proverbs 15:20; 23:15, 24; 27:11; 29:3).
12. A foolish son, on the other hand, is spoke of as bringing grief to his parents (Proverbs 17:25; 19:23).
13. No amount of ointment, no matter its quality, can hide the stench of a bad reputation.

Slide 3

14. In verses 2-4, Solomon advises us to look death in the eye and learn from it.
15. It isn't that we are to be preoccupied with death, but that we must not avoid the reality of death, and as a result, not take life as seriously as we should.
16. In Psalm 90:12, Moses wrote, "Teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom."
17. As Solomon states, "death is the end of every man, and the living takes it to heart" (v. 2b).
18. There is a "sorrow" which takes away this world's illusion of happiness or "laughter" and turns our heart and mind toward God — it is this sorrow

which is better than laughter.

Slide 4

19. In 2 Corinthians 7:9-10, Paul wrote, “I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God . . . For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.” (2 Corinthians 7:9–10, NASB95)

Slide 5

B. REBUKE IS BETTER THAN PRAISE (VV. 5-6)

“It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man
Than for one to listen to the song of fools.
For as the crackling of thorn bushes under a pot,
So is the laughter of the fool;
And this too is futility.”

(Ecclesiastes 7:5–6, NASB95)

1. In these verses, Solomon is comparing the “song” and “laughter of the fool” to “the crackling of burning thorns under a pot” in a campfire.
2. The result — “you hear a lot of noise, but you don’t get much lasting good” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, p. 86).
3. If we are willing to accept it, a wise person’s rebuke will accomplish far more in our lives than the flattery of fools.

Slide 6

4. In Psalm 141:5, it was Solomon’s father, David, who wrote, “Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head; let my head not refuse it” (ESV).
5. Solomon emphasized this truth numerous times in Proverbs:

“He is on the path of life who heeds instruction, but he who ignores reproof goes astray.” (Proverbs 10:17, NASB95)

Slide 7

“Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid.” (Proverbs 12:1, NASB95)

“A fool rejects his father’s discipline, but he who regards reproof is sensible.” (Proverbs 15:5, NASB95)

“A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.” (Proverbs 17:10, NASB95)

“Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise reproof to a listening ear.” (Proverbs 25:12, NASB95)

“Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed.” (Proverbs 27:5, NASB95)

“Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” (Proverbs 27:17, NASB95)

“A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.” (Proverbs 29:1, NASB95)

“The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.” (Proverbs 29:15, NASB95)

Slide 8

C. THE “LONG HAUL” IS BETTER THAN THE SHORTCUT (VV. 7-9)

“For oppression makes a wise man mad,
And a bribe corrupts the heart.
The end of a matter is better than its beginning;
Patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit.
Do not be eager in your heart to be angry,

For anger resides in the bosom of fools.”

(Ecclesiastes 7:7–9, NASB95)

1. I imagine that a number of us have experienced the difficulties of taking the “shortest route” suggested by the apps on our phones.
2. Though it is difficult to understand exactly what Solomon is saying here, it appears that he is giving us a picture of the vulnerability of wisdom.
3. “Oppression” or “extortion” (NIV84) can cloud a person’s judgement as he or she gives way to the pressures of adversity.
4. A “bribe” will “corrupt” that person’s “heart” through the temptation to quick prosperity.
5. Instead, Solomon says that it is better to consider a matter from its “end” rather than “its beginning.”
6. Many of us have perhaps heard the old adage, “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread” (Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*, 1711).
7. In other words, “a person who does not plan ahead and think matters through becomes involved in risky or unfavorable situations which prudent people avoid.”
8. This is why Solomon said, at the end of verse 8, “the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit” (NKJV, ESV).
9. It is also why He warns us, in verse 9, “Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, for anger resides in the bosom of fools.”
 - a. It is always better to respond than to react.

Slide 9

- b. In Proverbs 29:20, Solomon wrote, “Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.” (Proverbs 29:20, NASB95)
- c. Earlier in Proverbs 21:5, he wrote, “The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, but everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty.”

(Proverbs 21:5, NASB95)

Slide 10

D. TODAY IS BETTER THAN YESTERDAY (v. 10)

“Do not say, “Why is it that the former days were better than these?”

For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this.”

(Ecclesiastes 7:10, NASB95)

1. Looking back is necessary if we are to gain a true perspective in life.

Slide 11

2. One of the last things which Moses said to the Israelites before his death was, “Remember the days of old, consider the years of all generations. Ask your father, and he will inform you, your elders, and they will tell you” (Deuteronomy 32:7, NASB95).
3. There are many who long for “the good old days” when, as they say, things were better.
4. After the Jews return from Babylonian captivity, Ezra, the scribe, tells us that when the foundation was laid for the second temple, “many of . . . the old men who had seen the first temple, wept” for “the good old days” while the young men shouted for joy that the work had begun (Ezra 3:12-13).

Slide 12

5. Solomon, however, tells us that to become nostalgic and long for what we believe to be “the good old days” is not wise.
 - a. First, *it becomes a substitute for action*. As long as we are talking about what used to be, we aren’t doing anything today.
 - b. Second, *it becomes a substitute for proper thought*. We overlook the evils which took a different form or afflicted a different section of society in another time.
6. Instead, we must realize that . . .
 - a. Yesterday is the past. We cannot change it.
 - b. Tomorrow may never come.

- c. All we have is today.
7. We must live *today* in the will of God utilizing the wealth and abilities He has given us to serve Him.

Conclusion

Slide 13

1. In the first half of the last century, an essayist named Hilaire Belloc wrote, *"While you are dreaming of the future or regretting the past, the present, which is all you have, slips from you and is gone."*

Slide 14

2. In his second letter to the Christians in Corinth, the apostle Paul penned these words,

"And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain— for He says, "At the acceptable time I listened to you, And on the day of salvation I helped you." Behold, now is "the acceptable time," behold, now is "the day of salvation"—" (2 Corinthians 6:1–2, NASB95)

Slide 15

3. There is a hymn which I remember singing. It is not in our book, but its words reinforce these thoughts.

**Today is the day of salvation,
Tomorrow may be too late.
There's danger and death in delaying,
Accept God's saving grace;
His life on the cross He has given,
O come while yet you may,
Give Jesus your life and thus walk in His way,
Tomorrow may be too late.**